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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, August 26, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "PEARS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics and the Bureau of Plant Industry, United States Department of Agriculture.

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In spite of the reputation we Americans have for being a nation of fruit eaters, one of our summer fruits doesn't get the appreciation that the Europeans give it. That's the pear. In England, France, Germany and Belgium pears are great favorites -- perhaps the most highly prized of all summer fruits. I've heard tell from some English friends that the wonderful pears from the Isle of Jersey occasionally sell in London markets for as much as 70 dollars a dozen. I can't vouch for that, of course, but it's what I've been told. In Southern Europe for centuries pears have been too valuable ever to waste. Long before modern methods of preserving food were invented, peasant housewives in Southern Europe were keeping their pears over the winter by drying and smoking them. The hard, dry, black, smoky products might not appeal to our appetites, but they were treasures to those people. In France, you'll see little pear trees trained to grow flat against garden walls. This saves space. The wall also keeps the tree protected from the weather.

One reason why the pear is so popular in Europe is that it has been grown there for a long, long time and is much better adapted to the climate of the Continent than some other fruits. The pear tree likes a mild even climate and does not do so well in regions with sudden or severe changes in temperature. In this country the pear finds its most congenial environment in California, and Oregon on the Pacific Coast, and in New York, Michigan and other sections of the Great Lakes Region in the Eastern States.

Then, pear trees suffer from certain ills in this country which don't attack them in Europe. The pear blight is one of the most destructive pear diseases. Scald is another ailment that discolors the skin of the fruit and often affects and decays the flesh underneath. The pear blight is one reason why some of the most beautiful and delicate varieties -- the kind you eat "as is" -- won't grow successfully in certain parts of this country. The coarser, but sturdier varieties -- Kieffer, and other oriental hybrids -- are somewhat resistant to blight and furnish us with fruit for canning, preserving and stewing.

Well, pears in the country are either of European stock, or hybrids, or pure Orientals -- the hybrids are European combined with the ornamental Chinese or sand pear. The Bartlett pear and the Anjou -- those large yellow juicy delectable pears good to eat out of hand -- come to us from Europe and grow chiefly on the Pacific Coast. The Kieffer and Le Conte, which grow in the East and South particularly, have both Chinese and European ancestors.

Now here's an interesting and useful characteristic of all pears -- no matter what their ancestors. Their flavor is better if they ripen indoors instead of naturally on the tree. So gather your pears when they are fully developed in size and shape but before they start to change color much or to soften. At this stage you can hold some late-ripening varieties a long time in cold storage. Then, when you want to ripen them, you can bring them out into a moderately warm room, spread them on trays or tables, each one separate from the others. They'll soon ripen with a delicious flavor. Please notice that I said a moderately warm room. Too much heat may cause them to rot in the center yet show no sign from the outside.

The Kieffer pear -- that good hardy variety -- doesn't have all the virtues unfortunately. In flavor and texture it has never compared with some of the more delicate pears like the Bartlett. But the taste and flavor of the Kieffer improve tremendously if you store it a couple of weeks before using. The storage breaks down its hard tissues and gives a better flavor to preserves and canned pears. The right temperature for storing the Kieffer is 60 to 65 degrees F. -- no more and no less.

If you are rushed during canning season and haven't time enough to put up Kieffer pears, don't let that worry you. Mature Kieffers will keep in cold storage at 32 degrees temperature for as long as two months. After that they will need about 16 days at the temperature of 60 to 65 to ripen to be ready for canning and preserving. See what a convenient canning fruit the pear happens to be? It will wait patiently if you keep it at the right temperature -- and what's more it will improve by waiting.

We don't dry and smoke our pears to keep them through the winter, as the European peasants used to do. But we do have various ways of our own for preserving them. Pears are excellent canned. They make delicious preserves and very good pickles. They're delicious made into ginger pears -- preserved with a spicy sirup strong with ginger. Our grandmothers used to slice pears and make them into "ginger chips" -- thin slices preserved in ginger sirup. Pears make delicious conserve with other fruits like apples, quinces and lemons. And among fruit butters, pear butter stands high in popularity.

Now, maybe you'd like to hear some simple directions for making excellent Kieffer pear preserves. I have some that came straight from the Bureau of Home Economics at Washington, D. C. You start by paring the fruit, cutting it in quarters and removing the cores. Then weigh it and add three-fourths as much sugar as fruit in alternate layers. Allow the mixture to stand overnight to draw out the juice. Now heat the mixture slowly to the boiling point, stirring as it heats. Cook until the fruit is clear and tender. Then pour while hot into hot sterilized jars and seal.

Whenever and however you put up pears for the winter, remember just one point -- don't overcook them. That darkens their color. And it sometimes makes them unpleasantly hard.

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